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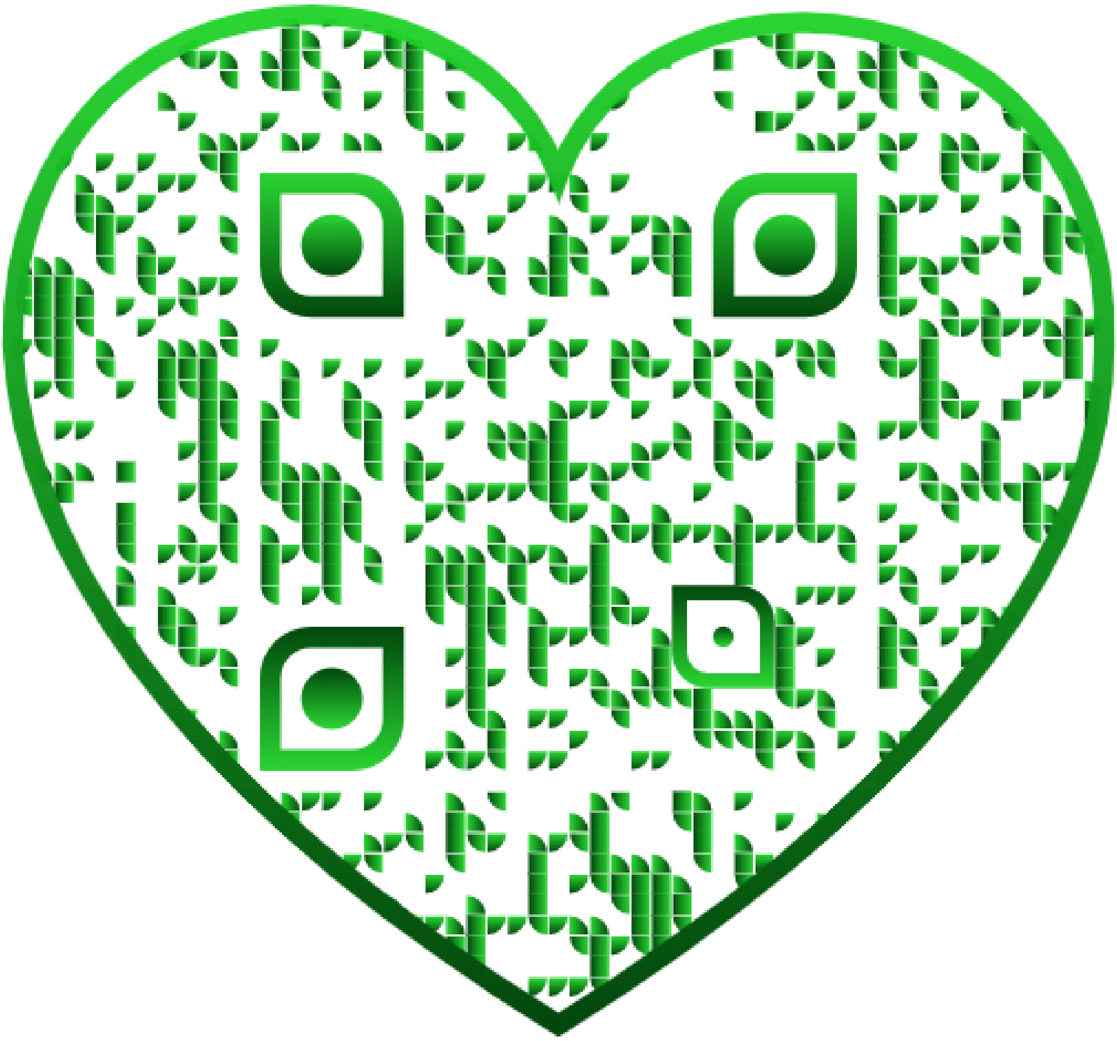

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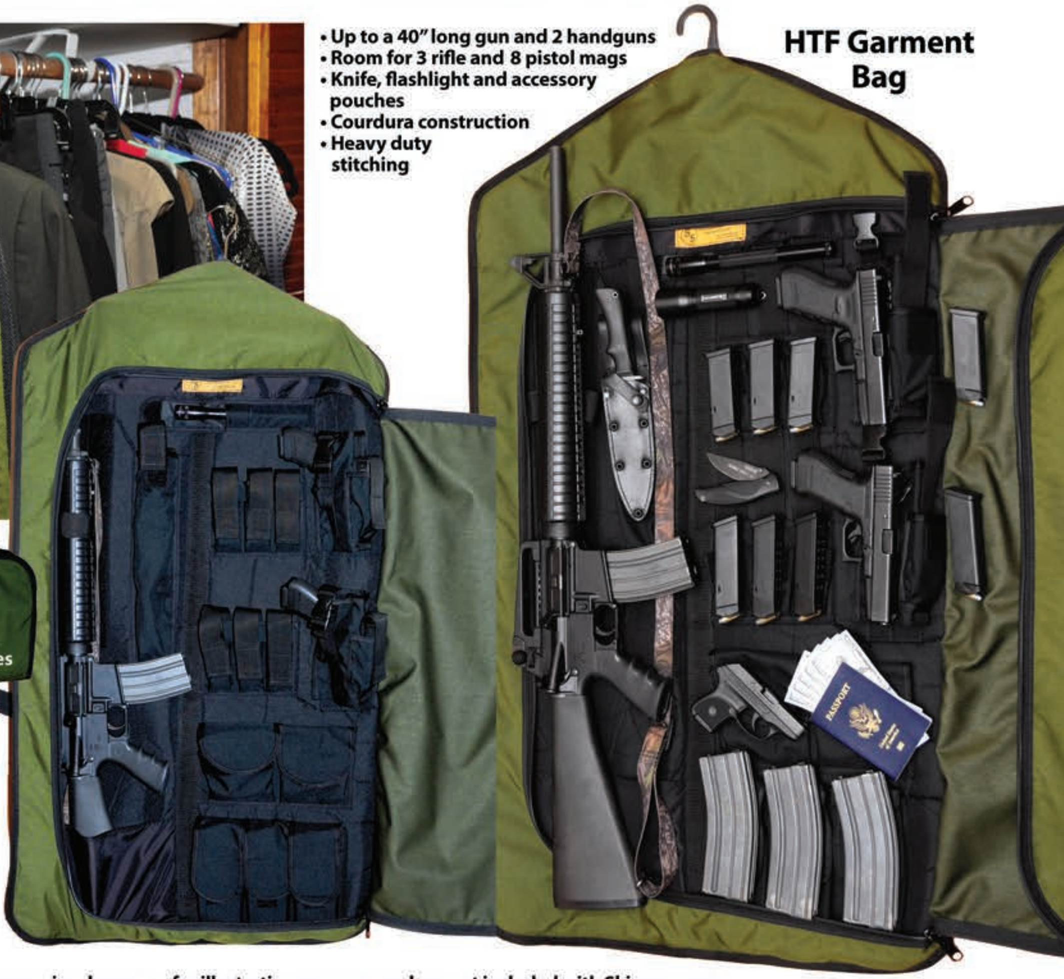
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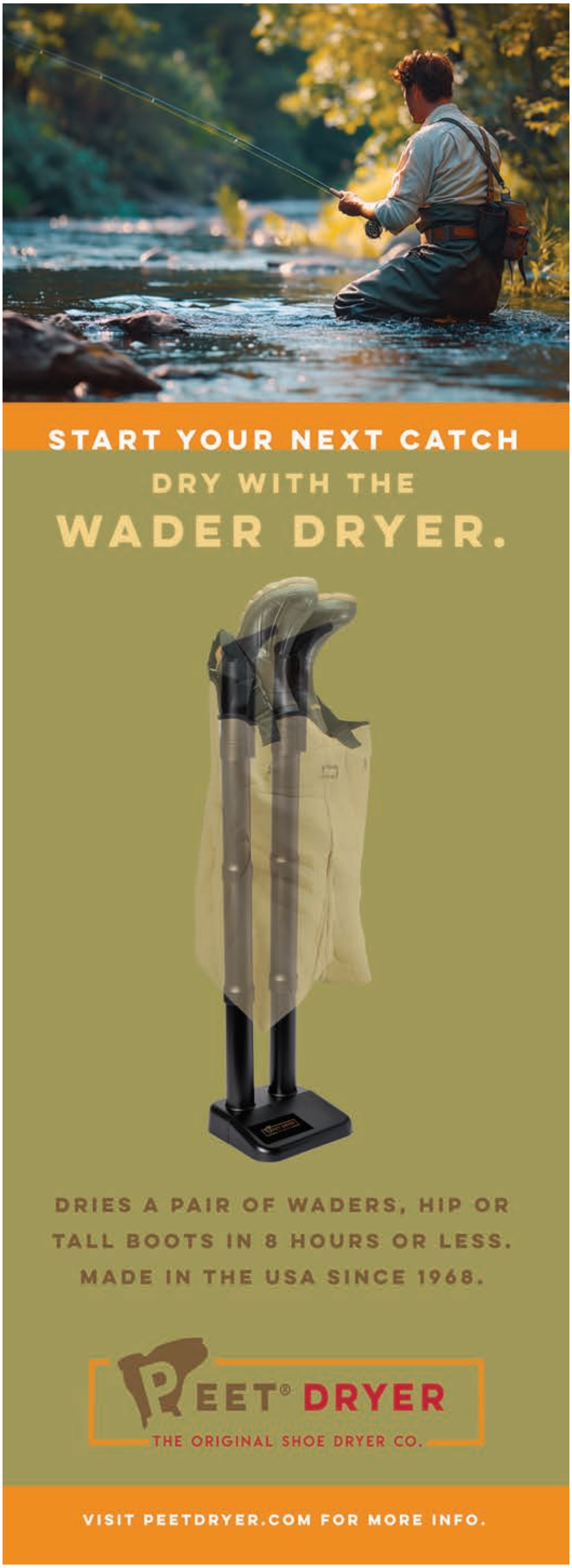

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ON THE COVER

Alaska's skies aren't always so friendly, as bush plane flights can be as much of an adventure as the destinations hunters and anglers fly to. Scott Haugen has both worked and played in the Last Frontier, and he's sharing some of his most exciting – and harrowing – air-travel memories in a two-part series kicking off this issue. (SCOTT HAUGEN)

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SAVING THE SUSITNA

American Rivers recently included Southcentral Alaska's Susitna as one of the nation's most endangered rivers. Why? Two proposed projects – the 100-mile West Susitna Industrial Access Road corridor and Susitna-Watana Dam – could be a major threat for spawning salmon on this famed Mat-Su Valley watershed. Tiffany Herrington chatted with Margaret Stern of the Susitna River Coalition for a deep dive into what's at stake.

(SARAH ANN LORETH)

FEATURES

25 A FAMILY'S ISLAND HOP TO KODIAK
Jeff Sanford made a decision to chase adventure and start a family with his wife Lia in Alaska. When they sold a lucrative marine equipment business in Dutch Harbor, Sanford's love for fishing dating back to his roots in Minnesota led to his opening of a fishing charter boat operation in Kodiak. Jeff Sanford tells us his story and vision for living a dream in the Great Land.

33 NO FEAR OF FLYING
In the Last Frontier, where roads are scarce, flights from point to point may not be as routine as you're used to. In fact, between the weather and sketchy landing strips, some can be downright terrifying. Scott Haugen has been witness to some bush plane rides that made him wonder if he'd ever reach his backcountry hunting destination or get back to his home base. In the first of a two-part series, Haugen reminds us that air travel in Alaska is not always the friendly skies.

41 HEADING OUTSIDE? TRY THIS GEAR!
For our From Field to Fire team of Scott and Tiffany Haugen, summer means pursuing outdoor camping and fishing adventures. If you're packing for a trip, perhaps it's time for some new gear to set up in camp? Fear not, as Scott provides you with his favorite lightweight cooler, mosquito repellent and a cast-iron skillet to eat like champions. Speaking of food, Chef Tiffany shares a tasty salmon smoking recipe for all those filets you're sure to take home from the river.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Regular readers of this space know I love to travel. But I also enjoy getting off the beaten path on my trips.

I haven't been to the top of the legendary Eiffel Tower, but I've crossed Jordan's similarly spectacular Petra and its remarkable archaeological sites off my list of world attractions. Someday I want to check out Istanbul and Turkey's bustling Grand Bazaar market, but I was lucky enough to get a similar vibe when I had a wild ride looking for a Cuban League baseball cap at Havana's chaotic indoor flea market, literally getting followed by vendors competing for my Cuban pesos. I haven't taken a swim off Italy's iconic Amalfi Coast, but I did take a dip – in a heavily insulated wetsuit – in the frozen Gulf of Bothnia off the coast of Finland while aboard an ice-breaking ship.

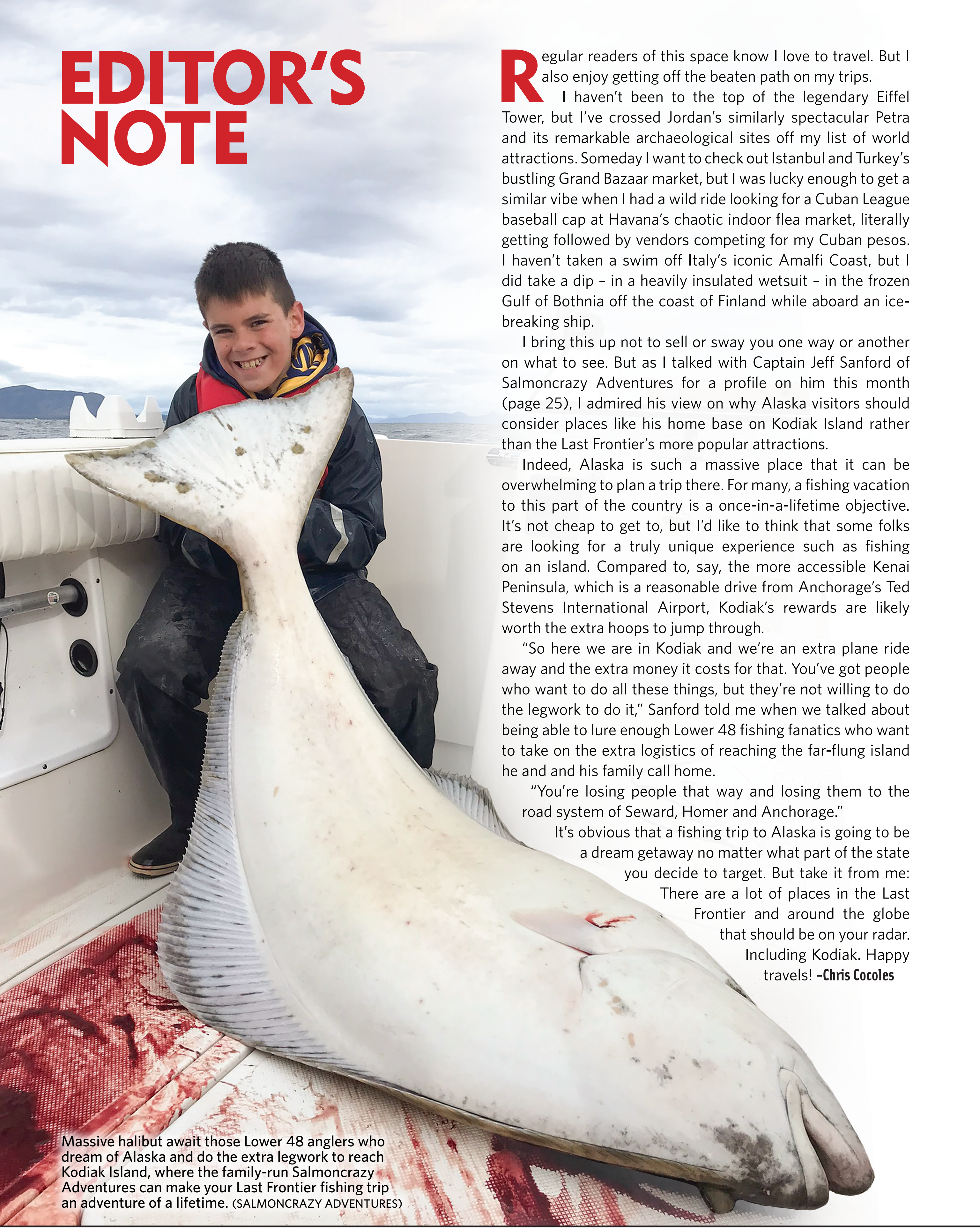
I bring this up not to sell or sway you one way or another on what to see. But as I talked with Captain Jeff Sanford of Salmoncrazy Adventures for a profile on him this month (page 25), I admired his view on why Alaska visitors should consider places like his home base on Kodiak Island rather than the Last Frontier's more popular attractions.

Indeed, Alaska is such a massive place that it can be overwhelming to plan a trip there. For many, a fishing vacation to this part of the country is a once-in-a-lifetime objective. It's not cheap to get to, but I'd like to think that some folks are looking for a truly unique experience such as fishing on an island. Compared to, say, the more accessible Kenai Peninsula, which is a reasonable drive from Anchorage's Ted Stevens International Airport, Kodiak's rewards are likely worth the extra hoops to jump through.

"So here we are in Kodiak and we're an extra plane ride away and the extra money it costs for that. You've got people who want to do all these things, but they're not willing to do the legwork to do it," Sanford told me when we talked about being able to lure enough Lower 48 fishing fanatics who want to take on the extra logistics of reaching the far-flung island he and and his family call home.

"You're losing people that way and losing them to the road system of Seward, Homer and Anchorage."

It's obvious that a fishing trip to Alaska is going to be a dream getaway no matter what part of the state you decide to target. But take it from me: There are a lot of places in the Last Frontier and around the globe that should be on your radar. Including Kodiak. Happy travels! **-Chris Cocoles**



Massive halibut await those Lower 48 anglers who dream of Alaska and do the extra legwork to reach Kodiak Island, where the family-run Salmoncrazy Adventures can make your Last Frontier fishing trip an adventure of a lifetime. (SALMONCRAZY ADVENTURES)

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POTUS AIMS TO REVERSE ARCTIC NATIONAL PETROLEUM RESERVE PROTECTIONS FOR DRILLING AGENDA

President Donald Trump's "drill, baby, drill" agenda to tap into whatever natural gas sources his administration can find continues to see pushback in Alaska.

In early June, Trump's Department of the Interior announced plans to rescind former President Joe Biden's 2024 executive order implementing protections for Northwest Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve, home to myriad big game and bird specie and which provides subsistence resources for locals and Native communities.

The White House argued that last year's decision contradicted the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976, which, according to an Interior press release, "was set aside by Congress for oil and gas exploration and development as a matter of national energy security and policy in reaction to the oil crisis in the 1970s."

"Congress was clear: The National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska was set aside to support America's energy security through responsible development," Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum said in the release. "The 2024 rule ignored that mandate, prioritizing obstruction over production and undermining our ability to harness domestic resources at a time when American energy independence has never been more critical. We're restoring the balance and putting our energy future back on track."

Tell that to those Alaskans who rely on other resources within the area the Trump Administration wants to drill in. There were a flurry of strong arguments condemning the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Land Management's actions, and much of the reaction centered on the feds' ignoring the science that led to the restoration of protections on this wildlife-rich public land in the first place.

"Everyone who cares about public lands and is concerned about the climate crisis should be outraged by this move to exploit America's public lands for the benefit of corporations and the president's wealthy donors," said Matt Jackson, Alaska senior manager for The Wilderness Society.

"The Trump Administration is destroying safeguards for globally significant and invaluable resources and the local communities who depend on them for their way of life. Worst of all," Jackson added, "this move will accelerate the climate crisis at a time when the ground beneath Alaska communities is literally melting away and subsistence foods are in decline. Eliminating this rule would remove vital protections for caribou and migratory birds, clean air and clean water."

BLM now believes that regulations in place prior to the Biden Administration's protection order of 2024 "have long guided responsible development in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska while incorporating protections for wildlife, subsistence and surface values through the Integrated Activity Plan process."

A 60-day comment period is ongoing and will continue through this month. But many in and out of Alaska already know where they stand.

"BLM is turning its back on the wildlife and habitat it is required to protect," said Nicole Whittington-Evans, Defenders of Wildlife senior director of Alaska and Northwest programs. "The reserve is home to an astonishing variety of wildlife, including polar bears, caribou, wolves, wolverines, musk oxen and millions of migratory birds from every continent on the planet, and all of which are now at serious risk. Defenders will continue to advocate for conserving and protecting these irreplaceable species and landscapes."

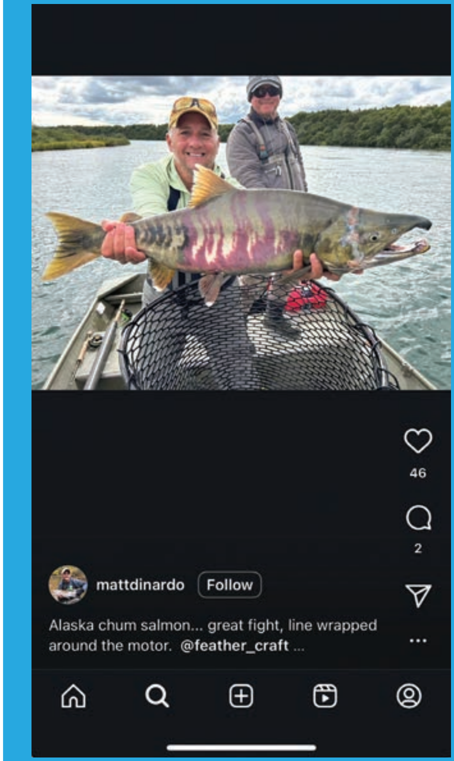
These bears within the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska's Arctic region could be impacted by a Trump Administration proposal to allow drilling on this protected public land, home of many species of big game and migratory birds. (BOB WICK/BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT)

15,000

Alaska Department of Fish and Game estimate of how many caribou are left in the Mulchatna Herd – down from 200,000 in the 1990s. The agency will request the Board of Game allow more hunting of bears and wolves to help protect the herd.

ALASKA BEAT

SOCIAL MEDIA POST OF THE MONTH



mattdinardo

Alaska chum salmon... great fight, line wrapped around the motor. @feather_craft ...

That's quite the chum, pal. Great catch!

How tough are Alaskans? Eighty-one-year-old Fairbanks' resident Robert Moloney hooked into a large halibut while on a charter boat. "I got a hit and the captain and his helper were helping somebody on the other side of the boat. And I just thought, 'I better do this myself,'" Moloney told Valdez Halibut Derby officials after catching the 130.4-pounder. "I'm 81, so I'm not the strongest guy in the world, but I managed to get it over the boat."

FROM THE *ASJ* ARCHIVES – JULY 2021

BORDERING ON BLISS

A float down the transboundary Stikine River near Wrangell included spectacular scenery, great fishing and lots of reflection for a handful of friends. (MARY CATHARINE MARTIN)

Crossing the border from Canada into the United States on the Stikine River was the first time I've ever seen the lines on a map made manifest. Trees along the line of the border have been clearcut for a width of about 10 yards in straight lines as far as the eye can see.

By this point, all of us except for my husband Bjorn, who bathes in ice water beneath the cool light of the moon, were looking forward to Chief Shakes Hot Springs. We surprised a curious brown bear on the banks above us and then turned into a still, almost invisible slough also known as the Ketili River.

A few miles later we turned into the shallow slough, just moments after a boatload of screaming people roared out of it at 30 miles an hour. Most people seem to be day visitors from Wrangell, and there aren't many places to camp. We found a spot for two nights in as high and flat a space as we could. The hot springs, though, were wonderful. One is indoors and one is outdoors, looking out onto a meadow filled with sunshine and birds.

For our last night, we'd booked the Forest Service cabin at Garnet Ledge, a few miles away from Wrangell. We left the hot springs early and paddled out into the miles-long expanse of the Stikine Delta. Arctic terns hovered, doves and yearling seals followed us, and the wind at the mouth of the river blew so hard it was almost impossible to steer a boat filled with air.

It calmed as we transitioned to ocean water, until the water was like glass. We navigated shallow waters, silt banks, and driftwood trees, whose trunks all pointed just a little to the right of Wrangell. **-Mary Catharine Martin**

THEY SAID IT

> *"The sustainability of Alaska's fisheries depends on honest fishermen, strong statutory oversight and industry members who engage in fair business practices. These sentences serve to protect lawful stakeholders into the future, by sending a clear message to would-be offenders. We remain committed to holding violators accountable and safeguarding Alaska's fisheries for future generations."*

-Benjamin Cheeseman, assistant director of NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement, Alaska Division, after two Kodiak fishermen were sentenced to one year in prison for illegally trafficking diseased crab from Alaska to Washington.

Diseased king crab transported illegally from Alaska to Washington and seized from the *F/V Gambler*. (NMFS)

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The Valdez Silver Salmon Derby opens July 19 and continues through August 31 with a $10,000 prize for the biggest coho. Included during that time frame is the first of two Big Prize Friday bonus events, July 25, featuring $500 awarded to the largest fish of the day. (VALDEZ FISH DERBIES)

OUTDOOR CALENDAR

July 1	2025-26 hunting regulations take effect
July 4	Mount Marathon Race, Seward (mountmarathon.com)
July 18-19	Copper River Salmon Jam, Cordova (salmonjam.org)
July 19	Valdez Kids Pink Salmon Derby (valdezfishderbies.com/kids-derby)
July 19-Aug. 31	Valdez Silver Salmon Derby (valdezfishderbies.com/silver-derby)
July 25	Valdez Big Fish Friday (valdezfishderbies.com/silver-derby/big-prize-fridays)
Aug. 5-6	Kenai River Junior Classic (alaska.asymca.org/kenai-junior-classic)
Aug. 8-10	Golden North Salmon Derby, Juneau (goldennorthsalmonderby.com)
Aug. 9	Valdez Women's Silver Salmon Derby (valdezfishderbies.com/womens-derby)
Aug. 9-17	Seward Silver Salmon Derby (seward.com/salmon-derby)
Aug. 20-22	Ted Stevens Kenai River Classic (krsa.com/program/classic)
Aug. 22-31	Valdez Salmon Slam Tournament (valdezfishderbies.com/tagged-fish-contest)
Aug. 29	Valdez Big Fish Friday (valdezfishderbies.com/silver-derby/big-prize-fridays)

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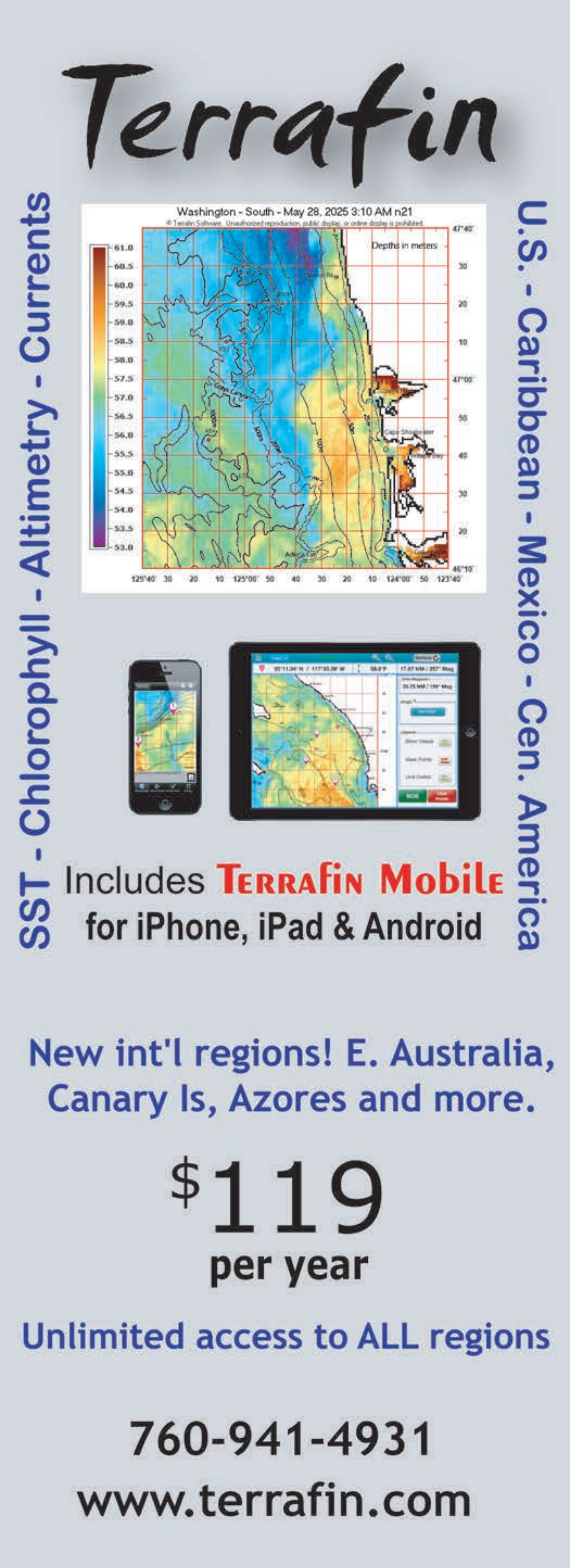
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WATERSHED AT A CROSSROADS

COALITION VOWS TO PROTECT THE VULNERABLE SUSITNA RIVER

BY TIFFANY HERRINGTON

Winding from the glacial flanks of Denali to Cook Inlet, the Susitna River flows through one of the most ecologically vital and culturally rich landscapes in Alaska. Its watershed is a lifeline for wildlife, for communities that depend on its fish and game and for thousands of Alaskans and visitors who find connection and peace in its remote stretches. But today, the Susitna faces an uncertain future.

In April 2025, American Rivers named the Susitna one of the nation's most endangered rivers, citing threats from the proposed West Susitna Industrial Access Road and the renewed interest in building the Susitna-Watana Dam. Both projects would significantly alter the watershed, disrupting habitat, traditional subsistence practices and recreational access.

To better understand the issues at stake, we spoke with Margaret Stern, program and communications director at the Susitna River Coalition (susitnarivercoalition.org), based in Talkeetna. From explaining the nuts and bolts of the projects to sharing a personal evening on a quiet riverbank, Stern helps us see not only what's at risk, but what's still possible.

Tiffany Herrington Why is the Susitna River so significant to Alaskans and the communities near it?

Margaret Stern The Susitna supports a massive watershed – about the size of West Virginia – home to most of the state's population and some of its most vibrant ecosystems. It fuels sport and

The winding route of the Susitna River is threatened by a potential man-made route, the West Susitna Industrial Road Project, which would support private mining interests. Opponents warn the road could threaten the Southcentral Alaska watershed. (ANDREW ESOLA)

The river drains the Talkeetna Mountains and Alaska Range and flows into Cook Inlet west of Anchorage. (ANDREW ESOLA)

commercial fisheries, nurtures wetlands and boreal forests and supports wildlife ranging from salmon and eulachon to moose and migratory birds. The watershed also sustains Dena'ina people, including Chickaloon, Alexander Creek, Tyonek, Knik and Eklutna, who've stewarded these lands for generations.

It's more than ecology; it's culture, economy and connection. It's where Alaskans fish, hunt, float, hike and simply exist in nature. In a time when wild places are disappearing, the Susitna still feels truly wild.

TH What does the "Most Endangered Rivers" designation mean for the Susitna?
MS Each year, American Rivers names 10 rivers that face urgent threats. For the Susitna, it's a call to action. The designation spotlights the danger posed by the West Susitna Access Road and revives attention on the dam proposal. We hope this recognition draws national awareness to what's happening in Alaska, because once places like the Susitna are altered, they don't return to what they were.

TH Who's behind the West Susitna Access Road, and what's the real goal?
MS Though it's marketed as a public-access project, the road is designed

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to support private mining interests. It's backed by [Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority] and the Mat-Su Borough, with partnerships from foreign junior mining companies. The Alaska Department of Transportation recently proposed building the first 22 miles and a major bridge across the river under a separate plan, but it's part of the same push to carve a 100-mile corridor through roadless wilderness. The public pays the bill, while mining companies stand to benefit.

TH Why do you call this a "boondoggle"?

MS Because the math doesn't add up. This isn't a road to meet transportation needs or connect existing communities. It would traverse sensitive wetlands, require 100-plus stream crossings and cut through one of the most hydrologically complex areas in the region – all for speculative gain. Like so many of Alaska's megaprojects before it, this one risks becoming another high-cost, low-reward case study in poor planning.

TH What would the road mean for fish and wildlife?

MS The Susitna Basin is essential for all five species of Pacific salmon, plus resident species like grayling and trout. Poorly engineered stream crossings could block fish migration; road runoff and sedimentation would degrade water quality. Wetlands, which are critical for waterfowl and moose, would be fragmented or lost entirely.

And let's not forget cultural impacts. The road would cross a site of significance to the Dena'ina people. Without meaningful tribal consultation, this project risks erasing this and other important sites.

The AIDEA economic report even acknowledges potentially significant impacts to tribal subsistence. It has also been discussed that the area might have to switch from a harvest ticket to a draw tag for some species for residents.

TH What kind of mining is being proposed, and how would that escalate the damage?

MS Primarily gold and strategic metals. There's also discussion of a coal and carbon sequestration project. Any

The Susitna River Coalition is also concerned about another proposed project, the Susitna-Watana Dam, which if completed would be a major threat to caribou migration and the five species of Pacific salmon that spawn in the river. (MARISSA GOERKE) mining would require more than just the road. Camps, fuel depots, power infrastructure – these would sprawl across the region. The public deserves a comprehensive, transparent review of all the long-term impacts before anything moves forward.

Alaska's hard rock mining laws haven't been updated since the 1800s, which raises real concerns about oversight, environmental safeguards and long-term accountability.

TH How does this battle reflect Alaska's broader challenges with development?

MS It highlights the tension between our state's push for resource extraction and the values of the people who actually live here. Many of these projects are advanced without public support, without thorough environmental reviews and without clear benefit to communities. If Alaska wants to be a global model for sustainable development, we need to slow down and do things right. Otherwise, we'll keep repeating the same mistakes.

TH What are local communities saying about the road?

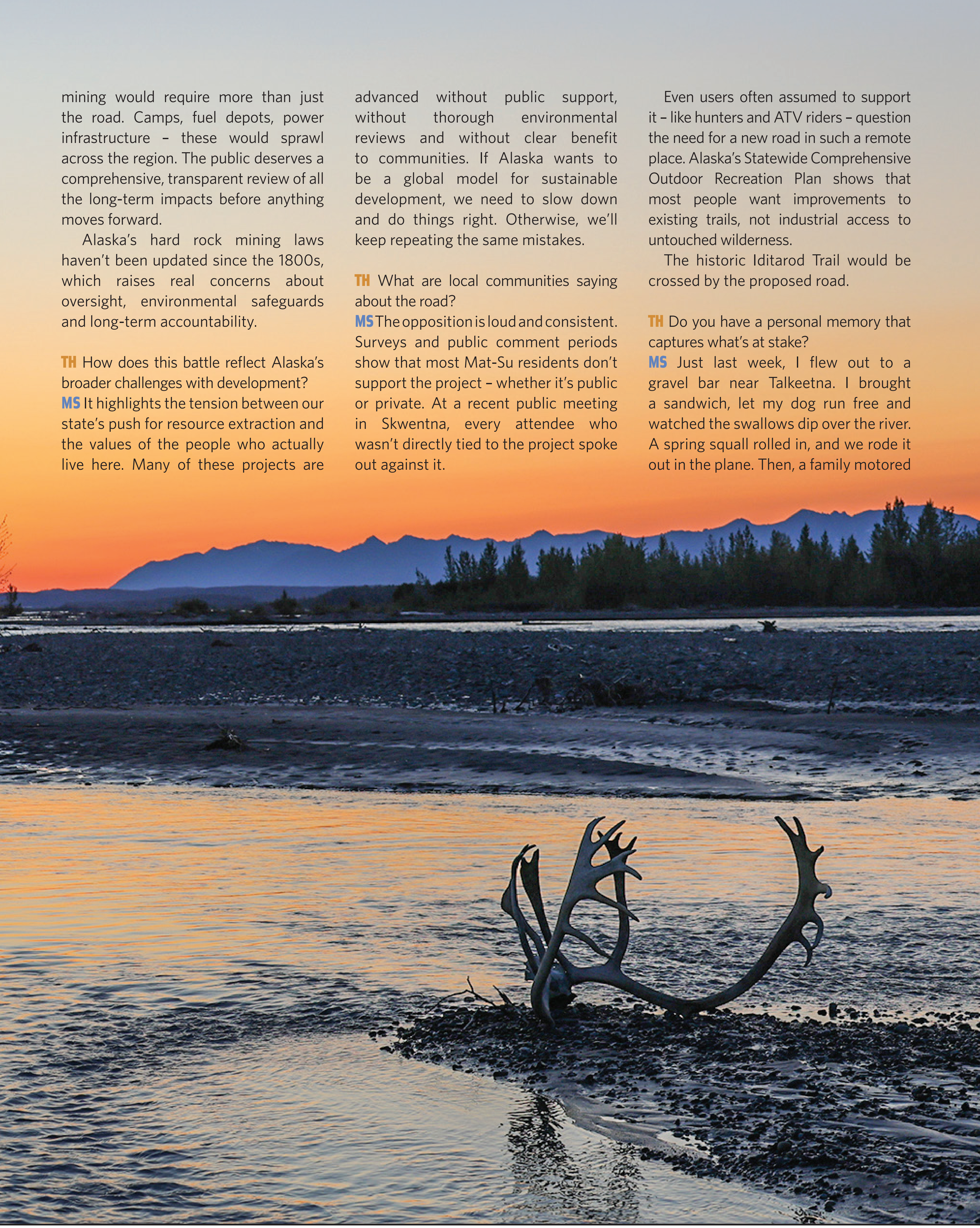
MS The opposition is loud and consistent. Surveys and public comment periods show that most Mat-Su residents don't support the project – whether it's public or private. At a recent public meeting in Skwentna, every attendee who wasn't directly tied to the project spoke out against it.

Even users often assumed to support it – like hunters and ATV riders – question the need for a new road in such a remote place. Alaska's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan shows that most people want improvements to existing trails, not industrial access to untouched wilderness.

The historic Iditarod Trail would be crossed by the proposed road.

TH Do you have a personal memory that captures what's at stake?

MS Just last week, I flew out to a gravel bar near Talkeetna. I brought a sandwich, let my dog run free and watched the swallows dip over the river. A spring squall rolled in, and we rode it out in the plane. Then, a family motored



Fishing is a huge part of the culture around the Susitna. "Poorly engineered stream crossings could block fish migration; road runoff and sedimentation would degrade water quality," Susitna River Coalition program and communications director Margaret Stern says. (SARAH ANN LORETH)

by in a boat and gave a wave.

Nothing dramatic happened – and that's exactly the point. This place still offers quiet, solitude and a connection to the land that's increasingly rare. That's what's at stake.

TH How is the Susitna River Coalition working to raise awareness? How can people help?

MS We focus on education and access to real information. This project doesn't make sense, but we lay out the facts so people can decide for themselves.

Readers can visit susitnarivercoalition.org, sign up for our newsletter and share their voice during public comment periods. Even a single email to a state rep can make a difference. Every voice matters.

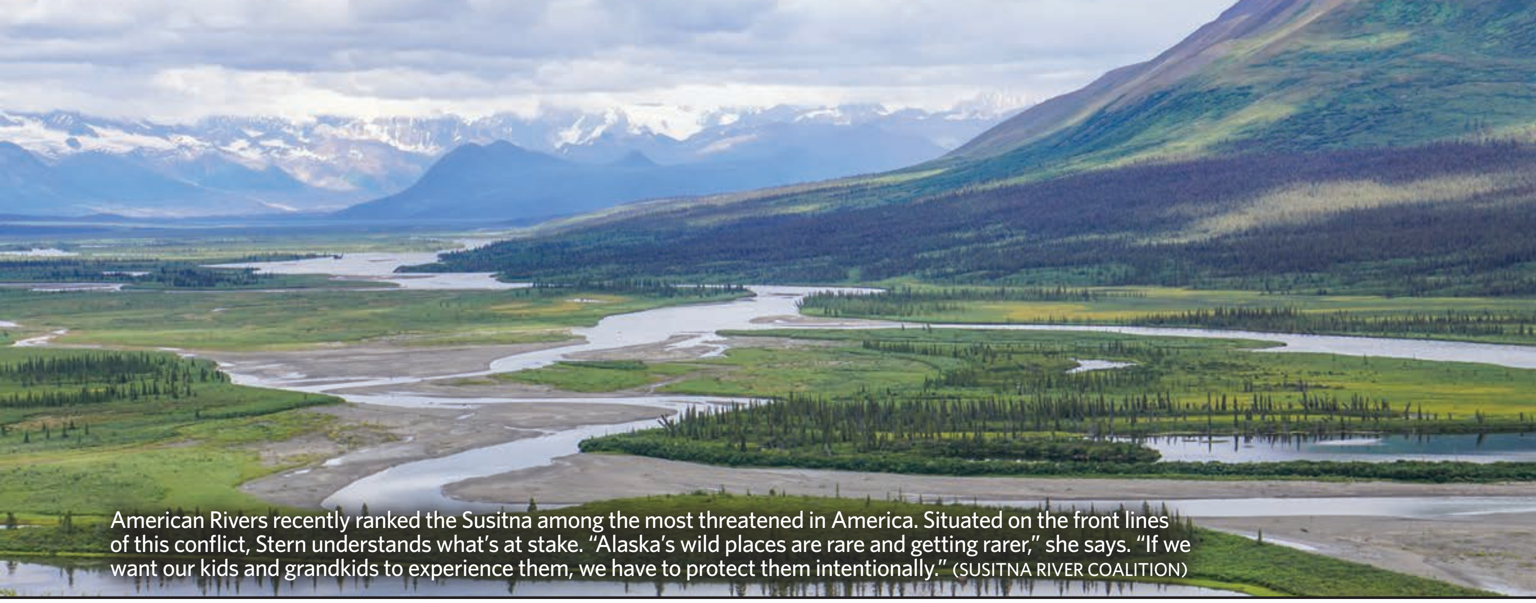
TH What keeps you hopeful?

MS The people. We hear from Alaskans every day – folks who fish, float, hunt or just care about the river. That sense of stewardship – that love of place – it's powerful. It reminds us that we're not alone in working to protect what matters.

TH Any final thoughts for readers outside of Alaska?

MS Alaska's wild places are rare and getting rarer. If we want our kids and grandkids to experience them, we have to protect them intentionally. The Susitna won't stay wild by accident. It needs care, community and the belief that some places are worth more than what we can extract from them. **ASJ**

Editor's note: You can also follow the Susitna River Coalition on Facebook and Instagram. Tiffany Herrington is a freelance writer based in the Seattle area.



American Rivers recently ranked the Susitna among the most threatened in America. Situated on the front lines of this conflict, Stern understands what's at stake. "Alaska's wild places are rare and getting rarer," she says. "If we want our kids and grandkids to experience them, we have to protect them intentionally." (SUSITNA RIVER COALITION)

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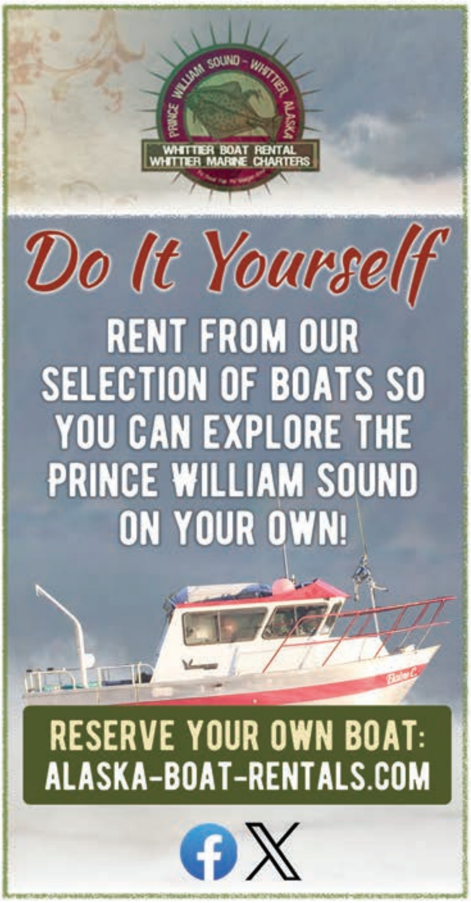

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BY CHRIS COCOLES

Jeff Sanford loves the Alaska lifestyle he chose to chase 25 years ago, and he loves to work. But even that passion had a limit, so it was time for a strategy change.

For 16 years, Sanford built and operated a successful ship repair and commercial fishing machinery innovation business in Dutch Harbor, where he headed to from his native Duluth, Minnesota, a quarter of a century ago. He'd soon marry his hometown sweetheart, Lia, and they would have two hockey-playing sons and a gymnastics-enthusiast daughter (Lia recently gave birth to another son). But when they had their third child while living in a 437-square-foot cabin, something had to give.

"At that point, our oldest son was 6 and basically I was working 100 to 120 hours a week, and I was just never home – just working my ass off," he says. "We got to a point where I thought, 'If life is going to continue to go this fast, the kids are going to be grown up and gone.' I had a lot of friends who missed their kids' childhoods altogether."

So while the flourishing business was hard to give up, when a newcomer to Dutch Harbor was eager to buy it, the Sanfords didn't hesitate to make a deal to sell the shop. They wanted to stay in Alaska, and the rugged beauty of Kodiak Island, plus Jeff's longtime passion for fishing, made starting a charter boat operation seem like a no-brainer.

Nine years later, Salmoncrazy Adventures (907-942-2506;

Jeff Sanford (here with three of his four kids) left Minnesota for a new life in Alaska. Fast forward 25 years, and Sanford and fam sold a successful Dutch Harbor commercial fishing machinery innovation business, moved to Kodiak Island and now run a fishing guide service. (SALMONCRAZY ADVENTURES)

The Sanford family hopes to show clients the rugged beauty of Kodiak and help make this less touristy corner of the Last Frontier a destination worth visiting for more people. "I really do love taking people out, showing them and teaching," Jeff Sanford says. (SALMONCRAZY ADVENTURES)

salmoncrazyadventures.com) has become one of the island's most popular and successful fishing guide outfits.

And while Sanford is still keeping busy this summer with bookings – "I'm just that guy. I'm a workaholic," he admits – there's still been plenty of time to coach his kids, who have been playing travel hockey from the time they learned how to skate. But it's a perfect blend of having a life away from the water and using his fishing skills to get clients into some epic fishing in Kodiak.

"It was a fine thing to do and I could have continued to do that forever," Sanford says of running his Dutch Harbor shop, "but life leads you down another path."

LAND OF 10,000 BEERS

Growing up on the shores of Lake Superior, fishing was in Sanford's blood.

"I had a lifetime of (fishing) experiences. When I was little, my dad got a really nice boat and kept it down in the marina in Duluth. On the weekends he would take off fishing," he says.

When Jeff was old enough to drive the boat back and forth from port to the fishing grounds, he'd be the designated captain of the vessel. One thing about northern Minnesota is the ability of the people there to drink beer!

In fact, young Jeff put together a side hustle of recycling cans of Hamm's and Pabst Blue Ribbon. Grandpa helped him make a can crusher in the garage.

"These guys would go fishing, and I would fill a 55-gallon bucket of crushed cans almost every weekend. Thousands of beers," Sanford says with a laugh.

After finishing school and with his hockey playing days having ended when he was 16, young Jeff would soon have the urge to leave Minnesota for the wild outdoor lifestyle of Alaska.

"Just got out of school and it was adventure time, man. Twenty years old, you're feeling invincible and bulletproof. I was like, 'Where can I go?'" he recalls. "'Spread the wings and let's just do it.' Just jumped on an adventure and had a two-year plan that was not close to how it shook out."

Lia, then his girlfriend, would soon join him in Dutch Harbor, and off they went, dabbling in several adventures, businesses and pleasure while making lifelong friendships with fellow

Sanford grew up around Duluth, Minnesota, where he was passionate about fishing with his family. When he finished school, "It was adventure time, man," he says. Alaska became his home, and his now wife Lia would soon join him there. (SALMONCRAZY ADVENTURES)

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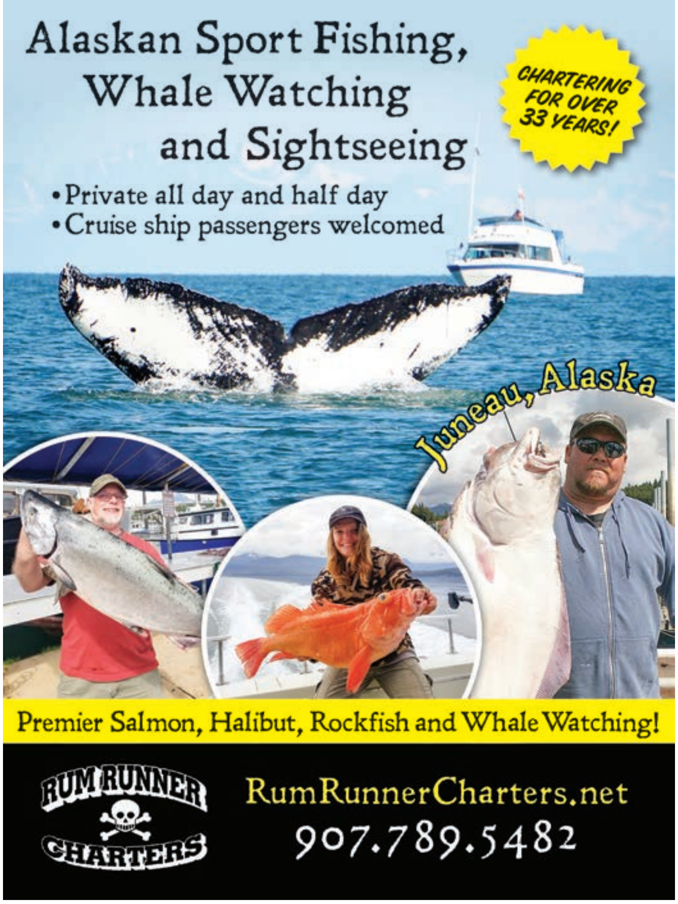

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Getting clients in some epic halibut fishing around Kodiak makes this leap of faith so worthwhile.
(SALMONCRAZY ADVENTURES)

Alaskans. While fishing adventures continued on the side, his focal point was commercial fishing machinery, which eventually became the first family business, "The Machine Shop," where Sanford would spend several years working well north of 100 hours a week. His shop was a hit, but the workload mounted to an unsustainable level, with no end in sight.

COACH AND TEACHER

After his youth athletic days were over, Sanford found his calling as a hockey coach, and when the boys started to play, it was natural for their dad to become involved in coaching and traveling to tournaments around Alaska and the Lower 48.

"It's fun until it's not. It's kind of like the problem when I was working 100-plus hours a week. You have zero down time, You're literally in a different city every weekend," Sanford says of the hockey itineraries he and the kids endured. "My oldest is now 15 and the younger boy 12. Super talented, awesome little dudes, but it gets to the point where things have occurred over the years where we had to stop the madness."

Now they're focusing on the family business, with everyone pitching in on the workload. And Sanford's background as a coach has translated nicely into tutoring the anglers who book trips for everything from saltwater to remote river adventures.

As a teenager, he was so effective at coaching that it was suggested he should pursue a career in teaching.

"That sticks in my head. I wanted to be a teacher, but when I was in high school, I was basically Ferris Bueller and not interested in academics," says Sanford, who still felt like his skills could work in a different genre. Enter the Salmoncrazy Adventures era.

"For me, I've always wanted to be teaching people," Sanford says, "showing people something that they want to learn. And I have the knowledge and ability to convey that. That's probably the most important impact of a teacher. People can be knowledgeable but have to know how to teach the subject to be effective."

"Teaching people some of the finer points about fishing, especially when you get out there with people who want to learn, I've always enjoyed that."

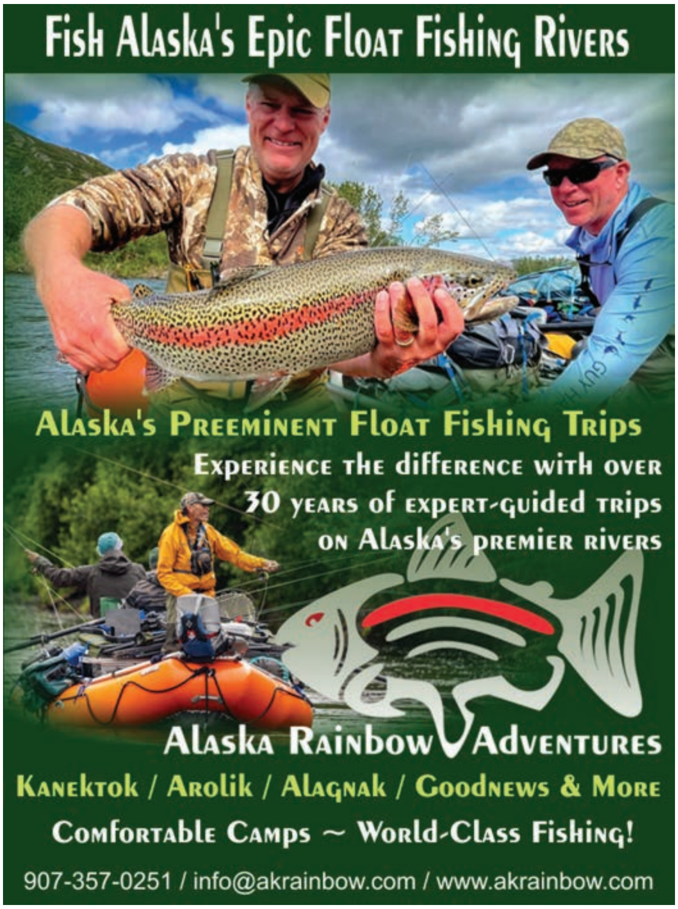
COME TO KODIAK

Alaska is massive and features myriad opportunities for visitors to experience something different. It might be camping and casting for lake trout, staying at a luxury Kenai Peninsula lodge or taking in the rugged and gorgeous landscapes of Kodiak.

"I've fished all over the state, from Kenai Peninsula and saltwater of Cook Inlet and all down the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Islands, to Bristol Bay, and Southeast," Sanford says.

"I've been to all these places, but one universal thing about Alaska is people from the Lower 48 – your run-of-the-mill visitors – they want to go to *Alaska*. They don't realize they need to go to remote places like Kodiak or Dutch. There are, of course, countless wild places in Alaska, but not many people are equipped to go that far into the unknown. They see the pictures and there's this idea in their heads about them wanting to catch all the giant fish and see all the scenery. Not a lot of them understand that to get to the real Alaska and the experiences they have in their mind, is to go to wild places."

And Kodiak, perhaps not as chic as Bristol Bay, charming as Homer and the Kenai or as scenic as the Panhandle, is the real Alaska that Salmoncrazy



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"It really is the true Alaska that people want. They have it in the back of their minds. When they go to Homer, they don't get that experience there. Homer's cool; Homer's neat, but it's very touristy; very much civilized; it's very much been conquered. It's not that wild experience and that rugged outdoor wilderness that they have in the back of their minds. A lot of people just want to go to Alaska and catch a bunch of fish, and you can find that in Homer, or Seward, and it scratches that itch for a lot of people."

"But the (clients) I'm after are the ones who want raw, wild Alaska, and when I connect with them, they'll eventually find their way to Kodiak. But there's financial constraints with a lot of people. And it takes two or three years to save up for that," he acknowledges.

And that's been the biggest challenge for Sanford in building up a base of customers who want that dream trip and to experience some of the state's best fishing action.

Sanford has invested in the tools needed to process catches himself. "It's a family business; we do it all," he says. You can bet that if you're willing to take the plunge into unspoiled Kodiak, your host at Salmoncrazy Adventures is eager to make your Alaska trip a memorable one.

"I'm a guide, not a god. (But) I'm good at what I do and I'm very passionate about this fishery, and I know it as well as if not better than anyone in Kodiak. And I'm still trying to learn. So I'll teach you anything you want to be taught in what you're about to take part in today," Sanford says.

"I'm trying to get you the best opportunity, but the outcomes are always a variable and a constant surprise. That's what I can do. Being both a teacher and a student of the game, so to speak, has always been there for me."

And it's all worthwhile when things come together. His sons are the deckhands on the Sanford boat, so maybe if they choose to, they'll have the same urge to make a go of it in the Last Frontier like their dad has.

Sanford calls it the "fishing on vacation" effect that he wants anglers who book an adventure with him to experience during a trip to Kodiak.

"I really do love taking people out, showing them and teaching," he says. "It's like seeing a kid catch a big old giant fish that would have never even been a possibility. It will blow your mind. A special experience." **ASJ**

Editor's note: Follow Salmoncrazy Adventures at Facebook.com/SalmoncrazyAdventures.

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Lia Sanford and her daughter, plus their two sons – and they just added another son to the clan – are all involved in the day-to-day duties of the operation. "It's a family business; we do it all," Jeff Sanford says. (SALMONCRAZY ADVENTURES)

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BY SCOTT HAUGEN

Darkness loomed on the remote Alaskan tundra. Skies to the west were much darker than five hours prior. It was comforting to finally hear the distant buzz of a bush plane's engine that Pat, Tim and I had been anxiously awaiting all afternoon.

Earlier that day we'd checked in with the bush plane service in Kotzebue via satellite phone. A big storm was approaching and they were making efforts to gather hunters they'd dropped off in remote camps and get them back to safety in town. The storm was forecast to last nearly a week, drop several feet of snow and create severe winds.

We were less than halfway into a 10-day moose hunt, and they'd planned on picking us up in the middle of the afternoon. It was going to take two trips to haul us, our camping gear, a raft, a grizzly bear hide and meat we'd harvested back to town.

Pat was a resident and had filled the only tag of the trip with a nice tundra grizzly on the first afternoon of the hunt. The berry-fed bruin was plump and its backstraps were delicious when cooked over an open fire.

It was nearly 7 p.m. above the Arctic Circle when we heard the plane approaching. We were quickly losing daylight, and Pat, Tim and I knew there wouldn't be time to make two trips before darkness closed in. As we pondered what to do, we saw another plane approaching. It was a smart move by the bush plane service, sending two aircraft with the dwindling light. Now we were assured of getting out along with all our gear.

As the Cessna 180 circled for a landing, I was taken aback by how easily the plane was tossed around. The winds were much more intense up higher than where we stood on a river bottom gravel bar. As the Cessna dropped closer, its landing gear 50 feet from touching down, a wind shear rocked it and nearly slammed it to the ground. The pilot powered out of it and was able to recover, clear a tall stand of alders and bank around for another landing attempt.

This time the pilot approached at a faster speed, quickly dropping in the final seconds to try and stick the

This Cessna 180 is about to hit hard on its landing, leading to bigger problems for author Scott Haugen and his buddies, who were on a moose hunt. Living, hunting and fishing in remote Alaska over the decades has meant plenty of harrowing flights for him. (SCOTT HAUGEN) landing. Right at the time of impact, a wind shear again caught the plane – this time from directly above.

The gust of wind pushed the wings down, slamming the plane hard onto the rocks. The pilot was able to keep the nose up and control the landing. I was impressed that the landing gear didn't break and the wing struts held strong. The big, soft tundra tires obviously helped absorb some of the shock.

We were hunting over 100 miles north of Kotzebue and had camped along the banks of the upper Wulik River, a place Pat had hunted many times. We saw some small bull moose, but nothing legal. When the storm appeared, our plans quickly changed. We figured we might get dropped somewhere outside the scope of the storm, maybe getting two or three more days of moose hunting in.

The 206 landed more smoothly behind the 180. Things were looking good.

HAVING LIVED IN THE Alaskan high Arctic for most of the 1990s, and traveled much of the state numerous times over the past 35 years, I knew how condemning Arctic storms could be, especially when flying is involved.

My wife Tiffany and I were schoolteachers in two remote Arctic villages in the 1990s, where we lived a semi-subsistence life. Our home, Point Lay, is an Iñupiat village situated on the northwest Arctic coast between Barrow, now known as Utqiagvik, and Point Hope. There were fewer than 100 residents when we lived there. Being on the coast it was common to not see bush planes for two weeks or more due to severe storms.

The other village we called home for four years was Anaktuvuk Pass, also situated on the North Slope. Point Lay was flat. Anaktuvuk Pass was nestled into the northern Brooks Range and surrounded by towering peaks that turn south in Canada and become the Rocky Mountains in the Lower 48.

I coached cross country, basketball and volleyball in both villages. All our travel was done by bush plane. None of the remote villages have roads leading to them, so air travel is the only means of getting in and out.

When returning to Point Lay from a volleyball tournament in Point Hope one spring, the autopilot stuck. The pilot couldn't regain full control of the plane. It was scary. The plane would go into a nosedive, then the pilot would regain partial control. Then it would go almost vertical, and the pilot again struggled for control before the engine bottomed out. This went on for several minutes. Had it not been for seatbelts, bodies would have been tossed about inside the plane. Most of the kids threw up. They were crying and in fear. We all thought it was the end. Fortunately, the pilot regained control of the Navajo and kept control until we safely landed.

I COACHED BOYS' AND girls' basketball in Anaktuvuk Pass. One season the girls played for the state championship. They were tough, the most dedicated kids I'd ever coached. Our travel budget was astronomical and we flew to several weekend tournaments over the winter season.

One stint we were gone for three weeks because severe weather prevented us from leaving the villages we were in, or from landing at home. We balled on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and I taught classes in the host school's library Monday through Thursday. That was easy; I was also the high school teacher.

Because we couldn't travel across the state, I scheduled tournaments to play close to where we were. It wasn't ideal, but it worked. It had to. In remote Alaska, the weather makes the rules. Defy them and you might pay the price.

One time when the boys' team was returning to Anaktuvuk Pass, we got caught in high winds. Oddly, it was smooth. We couldn't feel the turbulence. But our fuel

A few days into their moose hunt, the author and his partners had a change of plans due to a fast-approaching snowstorm. (SCOTT HAUGEN)

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Bush planes – whether wheeled or equipped with floats – are Alaska's taxis, servicing villages, tourists, and more. (SCOTT HAUGEN)

level was quickly running low and the pilot was forced to drop in elevation in order to get out of the wind and make headway. It was nearly dark, and more than once the imposing mountain peaks appeared mere yards from our wing tips.

On another return trip to Anaktuvuk Pass from a girls' game, the plane left Fairbanks, made one stop at a mining camp to drop off tools, then headed to Anaktuvuk Pass. The afternoon was clear and calm … until we hit the northern Brooks Range not far from the village.

The clouds were thick and unmoving in the stagnant air. A few peaks poked above the dense cover, but I didn't recognize them. I was sitting in the copilot seat. We circled and flew up and down valleys but couldn't see the village or any land. The pilot didn't trust his primitive radar at the time, not amid the confined peaks.

"Listen closely," he said on the headphones. "We've circled the area so much; I don't have enough fuel to get us back to Fairbanks or even the nearest landing strip. I need you to look closely through any holes in the clouds and see if you can recognize any landmarks below. If you do, tell me and we'll shoot through it. We have about 30 minutes of fuel left."

Ten minutes into the search there was a hole in the clouds about the size of a football field. I didn't recognize the tundra below. The pilot circled back over it, dipping lower this time. That's when I saw an Argo trail with snow in the tracks. I'd hunted Dall sheep off this trail and knew exactly where we were. I confidently relayed this to the pilot.

"How much room do you think we'll have once we get below the ceiling?" he asked.

"Facing north, you'll have mountains 50 yards to the east, right on the edge of the trail … keep left!" I said. "The west side is wide open all the way to the village."

Instantly, the pilot put the plane into a tight spin. Never have I lost elevation so fast, so abruptly and at such a steep angle, in a bush plane. Then g-forces in the little plane caught me off guard.

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No matter where you are in Alaska, or when, sudden storms can change your plans in a matter of minutes. (SCOTT HAUGEN)

As we spiraled down through the seemingly tiny hole in the dense clouds, the ceiling was less than 200 feet. The pilot nailed it and we skimmed the bottom of the clouds all the way to the village. I was petrified. The girls, all of whom were born and raised in Anaktuvuk Pass, didn't bat an eye. "That happens all the time," shared one girl. "It's just part of living up here." They didn't understand the severity of the moment.

Before we'd move to Anaktuvuk Pass and after we'd left, there were two devastating bush plane crashes in the Brooks Range. It can happen anytime, anywhere.

The scenery is fantastic, but seeing it comes with some risk. (SCOTT HAUGEN)

LIVE IN AND TRAVEL through remote Alaska long enough and bush plane mishaps will happen. You just hope to come out on the winning end. I've been on hundreds of bush planes over the decades, and while most flights are safe and enjoyable, the fact it only takes one experience to lose a life, always looms. Always. Too many friends and people I've met have incurred such devastation to think otherwise. **ASJ**

Editor's note: Next month, we'll look at more harrowing flight stories in remote Alaska. For personally signed copies of Scott Haugen's best-selling book, Hunting The Alaskan High Arctic, *visit scotthaugen.com*

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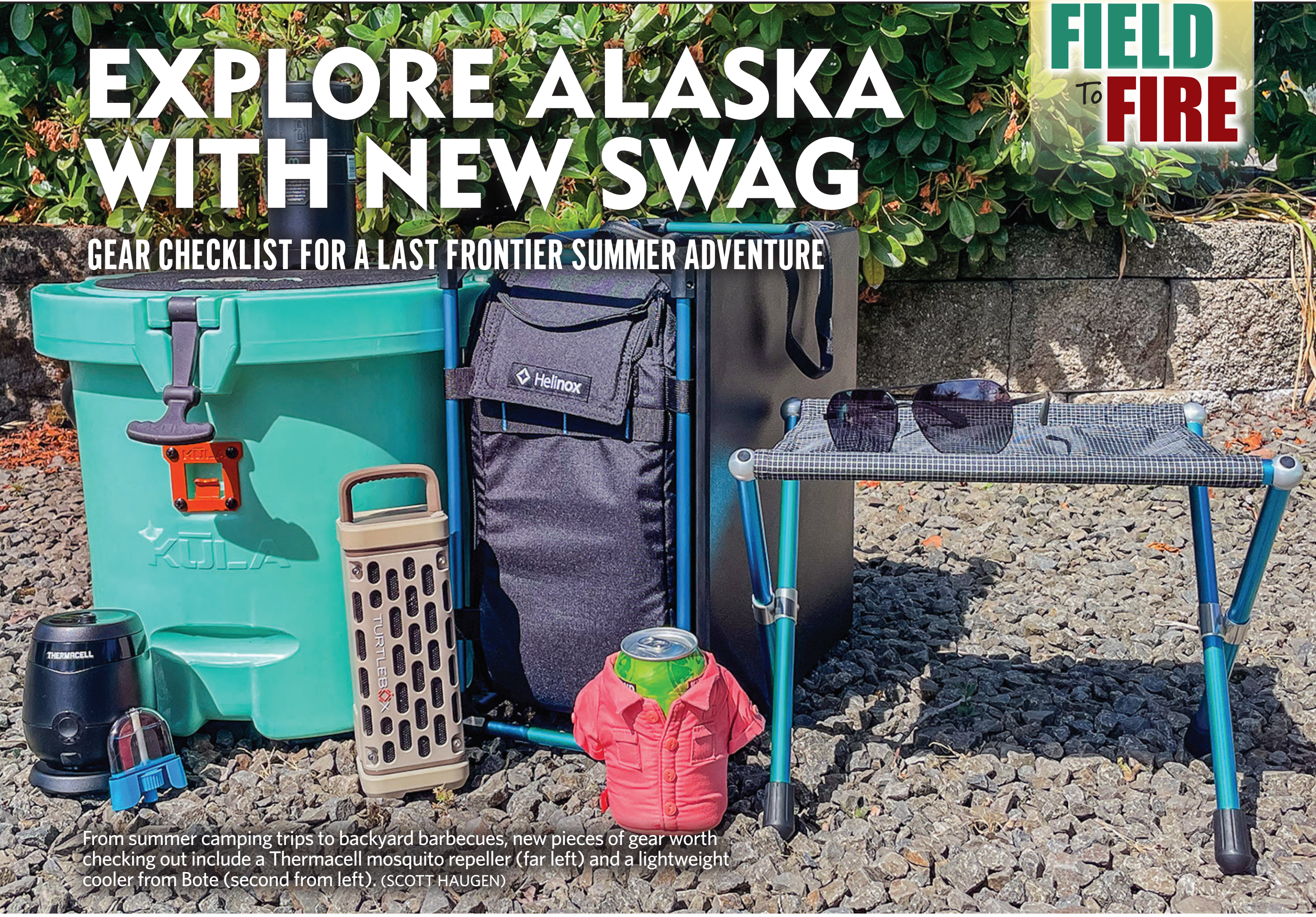


From summer camping trips to backyard barbecues, new pieces of gear worth checking out include a Thermacell mosquito repeller (far left) and a lightweight cooler from Bote (second from left). (SCOTT HAUGEN)

BY SCOTT HAUGEN

Summer has arrived in the Land of the Midnight Sun. And more daylight means more outside time. Here are some pieces of camping gear worth considering.

THERMACELL E65 RECHARGEABLE MOSQUITO REPELLER

Twenty years have passed since I first used a Thermacell repellent unit. I was one of two outdoor writers who got to test and help in its development, and I did so for two years before the product hit the market.

The first place I tested it was on the Nushagak River while fishing for king salmon. It worked, greatly impressing me and everyone else on board the big sled boat as it drove mosquitos away. Since then I've used them extensively throughout Alaska and many other places in the country.

The new E65 is a rechargeable repeller that's great for camping or backyard barbecues. It takes only two hours to fully charge and runs for more than six continuous hours while offering a 20-foot zone of protection. The repellent cartridge burns for 36 hours. The entire unit is airline travel-safe, as there is no butane cartridge like in previous models. It works great for mosquitos, no-see-ums and white socks. I'll be taking an E65 on multiple fishing and bird hunting trips on the Alaska Peninsula this summer. Info: thermacell.com.

TURTLEBOX RANGER

My first experience with a Turtlebox speaker came last winter when six buddies and I started setting a massive goose decoy spread at 2:30 in the morning. It made the experience fun – so fun that I had to have one. I didn't need the bigger Gen 3 model I'd first listened to, so I chose their new Ranger. There are few pieces of outdoor gear I can remember liking this much; I use it almost every day.

I first took it to the duck blind where I spent three hours doing postseason cleanup. I use it in the shop, during workout sessions, watering plants around the house, fishing and camping. For the first time in my life I enjoy listening to podcasts thanks to the clarity and portability of the Ranger. The magnetic mounts are ingenious, as are the other connective points and rugged design. It's replaced several of the nearly

From FIELD To FIRE

Salmon, whether it's a coveted sockeye or even a humpy caught fresh from saltwater, makes for a great meal via smoking. Chef Tiffany Haugen shares how to do it with time-saving liquid smoke. (TIFFANY HAUGEN)

HAVE A SMOKED SALMON SUMMER IN ALASKA

BY TIFFANY HAUGEN

Summer in Alaska means salmon. With king runs struggling, sockeye top the menu this time of year. And don't turn down an ocean-caught pink or chum, which are good eating. Even when catching these fish that are fresh into a river from the sea, you'll still eat well. Soon, coho will be making their way into Alaska's many streams. Bottom line: Whatever salmon you're after, they all taste great with this recipe.

Different from hot- or cold-smoked fish, using liquid smoke cuts the time for this delicacy by around 90 percent. Face it: liquid smoke was made for a reason. Flavorful, moist and buttery, this fish can be served hot or cold, eaten on its own or flaked over salad, rice or pasta. If you've already got the smoker out, give the fish 10 minutes of heavy smoke right before baking for another level of smoke essence.

A note about liquid smoke: Look for a 100-percent natural seasoning condensed from wood smoke. The best liquid smoke products have no other ingredients or chemicals in them.

One 8-ounce salmon filet
1 tablespoon butter, melted
¼ teaspoon liquid smoke
¼ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon white sugar
1 teaspoon pomegranate molasses
¼ teaspoon black pepper

In a shallow dish, mix butter, liquid smoke, salt, sugar, molasses and pepper until thoroughly combined. Skin salmon filet and marinate on each side for 10 minutes at room temperature. For trout – they're also great with this recipe – filet and skin whole on each side.

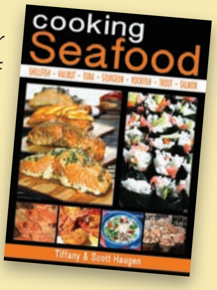
Bake in a preheated, 325-degree oven or grill in foil on medium-low heat for 18 to 24 minutes, or until fish reaches desired doneness or an internal temperature of 130 degrees.

TIP: REMOVING THE PIN BONES

To be honest, there's rarely a truly boneless trout or salmon filet until the pin bones are removed. Because removing the pin bones when the filet is raw can tear the flesh and make it soft and even mushy upon cooking, try removing the pin bones once the filet is cooked. The fat around the individual bones will cook away, making the meat more flavorful and the bones easier to remove.

Once cooked, the ends of the pin bones will protrude from the filet, making them easy to grab and pluck out with tweezers. Over a decade ago, I picked up a Shun Fishbone Tweezer. Its design makes it easy to handle and it's held up great on countless salmon, trout and bottomfish over the years.

Editor's note: For signed copies of Tiffany's popular book, Cooking Seafood, and other best-selling titles, visit scotthaugen.com.



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Yeti's cast-iron skillets are versatile, distribute heat very evenly and are easy to clean – even after turkey burgers – and keep conditioned. (SCOTT HAUGEN)

half-dozen sound devices that have been plugged in throughout our home for years. Info: turtleboxaudio.com.

BOTE KULA 5, PUFFIN DRINKWARE, TIMBERLAND SUNGLASSES

Some of the big coolers on today's market are great, but not practical when it comes to camping in Alaska, where space and weight are a concern. Enter the Bote Kula 5, which transcends traditional linear coolers; think of it as a 5-gallon bucket on steroids. The Kula 5 is extra sturdy and easy to carry. It works great as an extra seat – even as dry storage – and the Magnepod attachment point is great for magnetic accessories like drinkware, or even tools. Info: boteboard.com

A fun accessory everyone in camp and on the boat seems to enjoy is Puffin Drinkware. I got a couple of their Skiff designs and can report they keep drinks cool. The Puffin line is extensive, making not only a great addition to your summer outdoor life, but they're a fun gift idea. Info: puffindrinkware.com.

Sunglasses are much needed summer equipment. Timberland made their mark in the footwear world in the 1970s. Now they've taken their top-notch reputation to the eyewear market. When I first tried their pilot-style sunglasses, I thought they'd be too big. But the more I wore them, the more I liked them. The larger-than-normal frame not only blocks headwinds but inside glare from behind, and the sides are greatly reduced compared to other, wide-framed shades I've tried. They're also polarized, meaning they're great for fishing. Info: Timberland Eyewear can be found on Amazon.

HELINOX OUTDOOR FIELD OFFICE AND SPEED STOOL

Being full-time outdoor writers, my wife Tiffany and I do a lot of work in the field. She instantly fell in love with the Helinox Speed Stool because of its light, compact and sturdy design. It's easy to toss in a backpack and sit in comfort to jot notes. It's also handy around the campfire.

Tiffany also got much use from the Helinox Outdoor Field Office. This space-saving, all-inclusive storage and desk system is brilliant, and it sets up in seconds. The desk supports over 60 pounds and offers enough space for simple field jobs.

I first used it when checking trail cameras on a hot summer day. My tailgate was full of bulky gear and it was too hot to work inside the truck. So I broke out the Field Office, moved it to the shaded side of the truck and downloaded over a dozen trail camera cards to my laptop, then backed them up on an external drive. If you're driving or

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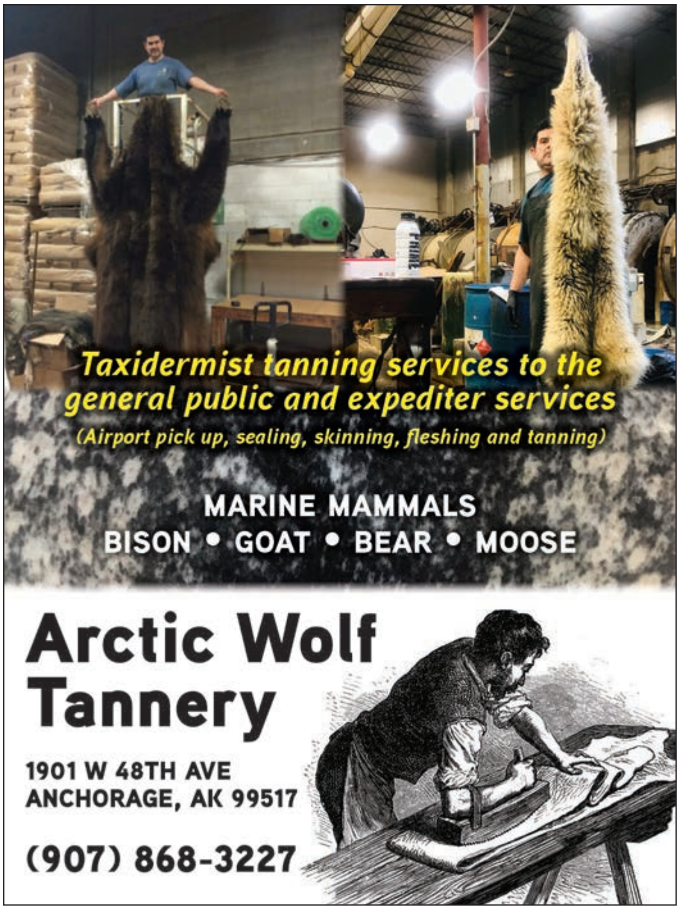

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boating to a camping location this summer and need to devote a bit of time to work or recreational projects, this could be the answer for a compact, functional space. Info: helinox.com.

PELICAN 1535 AIR CARRY-ON CASE

I've been a fan of Pelican cases for years, as the durability and functionality of their storage cases and coolers are top-notch. Enter their 1535 Air Carry-On Case. In an effort to find a more reliable travel case for my camera gear, I chose this one. On my first trip, the case held over $20,000 in camera gear, and everything traveled well and stayed fully protected. The case is nearly half the weight of my previous one, meaning more gear can be stored. It's dustproof and watertight, thanks to an efficient O-ring seal. It has a pullout handle, durable wheel system and an easy-carry handle for the field. I recently customized the 1535 Air Case with Pelican's foam padding, and my video editor traveled flawlessly with camera and computer gear through five countries. I'll be taking it on multiple flyout photography trips in remote Alaska this summer. Info: pelican.com.

SEA TO SUMMIT ACCESSORIES

Sea to Summit's extensive line of lightweight travel accessories have been proven for years. On a number of outings Tiffany and I have enjoyed the performance of their Airlite and Drylite Towels, both of which are very absorbent, take up minimal space and are quick to dry.

Sea to Summit's Aeros Ultralight Travel Pillow is comfortable and very compact. I've highlighted their dry bags in this column before, and they're a great tool for a range of summer outings. Info: seatosummit.com.

YETI CAST-IRON SKILLETS

And finally, Yeti is known in the outdoor community for many great cooler and drinking container products, but did you know they have a line of cast-iron skillets? For 15 years, a big part of my wife's career as a full-time outdoor cook and recipe developer was traveling around the country delivering cooking seminars. She did a lot of cooking with cast iron. This past winter she tested Yeti's new line and has been using them ever since. From big game to fish, game birds to hearty breakfasts, she's loved the even heat distribution of these skillets. They come preseasoned, are smoother than other cast iron she's cooked with and are easy to clean and maintain. The skillets work great over an open-fire gas stove, and she uses them a lot on both our home glass top and portable induction cooktops. Info: yeti.com.

There you have it; these are some great items I know work. All that's left to do is get out and enjoy what Alaska has to offer this summer. You can catch up on sleep this winter. **ASJ**

Editor's note: For signed copies of Scott Haugen's best-selling book, Hunting The Alaskan High Arctic, *visit scotthaugen.com. Follow Scott on Instagram.*

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WHAT I'VE LEARNED

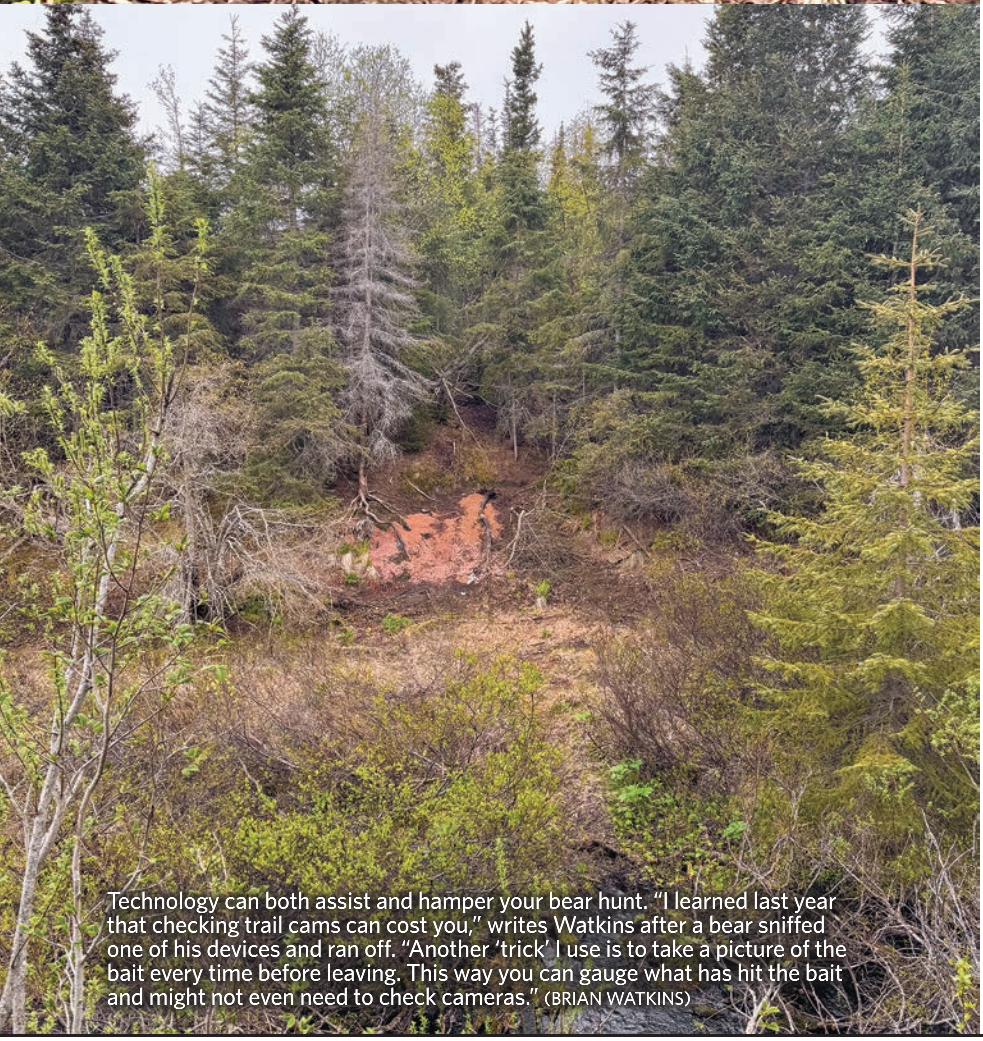
A BEAR HUNTER SHARES HIS BAITING EXPERIENCES

BY BRIAN WATKINS

While bear baiting over the years, I've learned countless tricks by trial and error. I have a lot of friends who reach out asking for advice. Generally, the questions are "How long do you wait between baiting and sitting?" and "How do you consistently trick the noses of bears?"

It's understandable for a less savvy hunter to take the first decent-sized bear that starts feasting on their bait. But author Brian Watkins stays patient with the intention of taking a more mature, larger bruin. (BRIAN WATKINS)

Watkins, now a veteran of setting up bait stations, has learned a lot of lessons by trial and error over the years. (BRIAN WATKINS)



Technology can both assist and hamper your bear hunt. "I learned last year that checking trail cams can cost you," writes Watkins after a bear sniffed one of his devices and ran off. "Another 'trick' I use is to take a picture of the bait every time before leaving. This way you can gauge what has hit the bait and might not even need to check cameras." (BRIAN WATKINS)

SIZING UP THE COMPETITION

A lot of hunters have the misconception that baiting is throwing food on the ground and killing a bear. There's a reason why year after year the same hunters are killing big bears. First and foremost, and to get it out of the way: In order to kill big bears, quit killing the small ones!

I know of far too many hunters who shoot the first bear that comes in. Big boars typically aren't the first to come in either. Leave a sow and let her go into heat and the big boys will slip up. Yes, they are the apex predator of the woods, but they sure don't act like it. The big boars are cautious and patient. Study bears before you go out. Learn the difference between a sow and a boar. Learn the different characteristics of a small bear versus a big bear. (Editor's note: See the May 2025 issue for lots of expert tips.)

CALLING UP THE CAMERA

I learned last year that checking trail cams can sometimes cost you a shot at one of the aforementioned boars. I had gone into my bait and checked the trail cam. There wasn't a bear I was after, but the wind was perfect and the weather was great. It seems like those low-wind, sunny days make the bears move a lot more. So I decided to sit and see what came in. I had a feeling. That evening, a brown bear sow came in and went directly to my camera. She sniffed it and took off. Although brown bears rule the forest, they are exceptionally cautious.

A little bit after she left, a boar came in and went to do the same thing. Knowing I had to act quickly, I sent an arrow into his vitals. I'm certain he was on the same path as that sow: come in, smell danger and leave.

I was lucky enough to have taken that bear, but it was a close call. Now, instead of checking a camera and leaving it up, I release the strap and take the device to the stand with me.

Trail cameras are cheap nowadays. You can find one on Amazon for $35. I keep two cameras on the bait now, and I only pull one of the two to take to the stand. I haven't touched the other since the start of season. If I have an unsuccessful hunt, I'll go back and strap

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The tedious process of refilling bait, checking cameras and being careful not to leave scent at a station can make you a bit crazy, but stay at it and you might just bag a big boar. (BRIAN WATKINS)

the camera back up. But this prevents the problem of my scent being there for those bears to smell. I also wear rubber boots and make sure not to kneel anywhere. The bigger bears will still smell your boot tracks, so try to come in from an area where their path isn't likely to cross.

PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY

Another "trick" I use is to take a picture of the bait every time before leaving. This way I can gauge what has hit the bait; if it's untouched, I might not even need to check the cameras.

I snap a picture after baiting for the first time and take another when rebaiting. When I go back to hunt, I pull that picture up and look over what's different. Generally, you can make an educated guess about whether a bruin has been by. If it looks like a substantial amount of bait is gone, you may not even want to check cameras. If I think there's been brown bear action and the wind is good, I won't even check the trail camera to see what is there. It keeps it fun not knowing as well.

BROWN VERSUS BLACK BEARS

On the flip side, if there's minimal bait missing, I assume it's black bears, which aren't as skeptical as their larger counterparts. I'll check the camera if this is the case, and I still use caution about where I walk and bring the camera back to the bait.

This year, I was tricked into believing brown bears were on my bait station. A large pile of dog food was missing, and I assumed a brown bear had been through. I grabbed the camera to check it and watched the path I crossed. My first sit showed a giant black bear on camera. There were two smaller black bears coming in as well. They were there daily, so I expected to have some good fortune. The smaller bears were in and out, but I knew when the big boar came in. He swayed slowly as he crept into the bait. He stopped about 10 yards behind it and surveyed what was around. He came in and, after a few minutes, turned broadside.

I let the arrow fly. I was trying out an Evolution Hyde broadhead from a friend's recommendation. I finally broke down this year and bought a new Mathews Lift. The combination of this setup and a well-placed shot landed the bear within 75 yards.

The blood trail was difficult to track, as those big bears often close up holes with fat. It took me 45 minutes of crawling on my hands and knees to find the bear. I know the different paths the bears take at this bait, so I slowly followed them. I was only 4 feet away from the bear when I noticed him there. Although the blood trail was all but nothing, that broadhead did its job and left a 2-inch hole.

After 10 days of letting the bait sit, I went back with one of my best friends, Dave. While hoping brown bears were on the bait, we were surprised to see an even bigger black bear. After having taken my best bear, I told Dave he could shoot it if it came in.

FIND THE PATTERN

Everyone talks about patterning bears. It's usually the way to go. They work on a time schedule and come in plus or minus a few hours from previous rounds. However, this bear was different. He was hot on one of the sows that I talked about passing up earlier in this article. He was in for a couple of days around 9 p.m., then changed to 4 a.m. for the three days leading up to us sitting. I didn't expect to see him that night, but with good

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wind we sat anyway.

The sow came in and fed for around an hour. She left and all movement died down. Two hours later a massive black bear came into the bait and stood perfectly broadside. I told Dave he could take him, but Dave knew it was the biggest black bear I've seen there in 11 years of baiting.

He insisted I shoot him. I had an Evolution blade on again, but this time it was the Jekyll. The difference is that the Jekyll is all fixed blade and the Hyde is fixed on one side and expandable on the other.

We heard the bear die only 25 yards away. There wasn't a need to blood trail it, but I still looked over the tracks for blood. Again, those big bears take a lot of time to bleed out. I didn't find blood, but when we got to the bear, he was laying in a pile of it. The shot had passed through the heart.

BEING SELECTIVE PAYS OFF

I'd just taken two of my best bears within 10 days of each other. Having been selective in over a decade of hunting, my bait site has allowed me to consistently take nice bears. Keep at it and be patient.

Always, and I mean always, think about scent control. Think about what path you're taking. Think about who you're baiting with and where they walk. Think about what you touch. Think about what you brush up against. Never set a bait with a bad wind.

All of this scent control will help you. Bears' eyesight can be very poor, so they rely heavily on instinct and their nose.

Keep all this in mind and you might score a big bear too. **ASJ**

Success is satisfying, especially when you've waited to take the bear you really want. "Having been selective in over a decade of hunting, my bait site has allowed me to consistently take nice bears," the author states. "Keep at it and be patient." (BRIAN WATKINS)

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